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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: April 24, 2009

Summary: Reports that the Taliban moved into Shangla district, adjacent to Swat, and "forced the Frontier Constabulary to defer stationing its units in Buner" dominated headlines in all newspapers on Friday. All newspapers also highlighted U.S. Special Envoy Holbrooke's phone call to President Zardari "to discuss the regional situation." His pledge "not to leave Pakistan in the lurch" also received prominent coverage. Defense Secretary Gates' statement that "Pakistani leaders must act to stop Taliban" received extensive coverage. All dailies reported that the Foreign Office "rejected" Secretary Clinton's remarks that Islamabad was abdicating to the Taliban, saying that "Pakistan was playing a positive and constructive role."

Most newspapers ran editorials on the national security situation and the growing Taliban threat in the country. Commenting on the recent statement of Secretary Clinton the center-right national English daily "The Nation" noted that "as time passes, the U.S. assessment of the Pakistan situation following the conclusion of the Swat peace deal is taking on a gloomier look and one finds top American officials making statements that not only show the Obama Administration's exasperation at Islamabad's attitude towards terrorism but also its disregard of ordinary norms of diplomacy." The prestigious English language daily, "Dawn," observed that "American officials need to remember what went so wrong under the Bush administration: poor policy coupled with unhelpful public statements. Repeating the mistakes of the past will have the same negative consequences." End Summary.

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News Stories  
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"Taliban Ambush FC Convoy, Foil Buner Deployment" "Dawn" (04/24)

"The Taliban forced the Frontier Constabulary to defer stationing of its units in Buner district on Thursday after they ambushed a police vehicle that was piloting a convoy bound for the besieged region, killing two policemen. Taliban have also moved into the adjacent Shangla district, local lawmaker Fazalullah told AFP."

"Holbrooke Calls President Zardari" "The News" (04/24)

"The United States Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, phoned President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday and discussed with him the regional situation. The U.S. Special Representative said that his country would not leave Pakistan in the lurch and both would take fight against extremism to its logic conclusion."

"Pakistan Must Act Against Taliban: Gates" "Dawn" (04/24)

"Pakistani leaders must act to stop Taliban who are posing a threat to the country's stability, US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said on Thursday. Mr Gates told reporters that in his discussions with Pakistani leaders, the government appeared to grasp the threat posed by Taliban militants, but he stressed that the leadership needed to take action."

"FO Rejects Hillary's Criticism" "Dawn" (04/24)

"The Foreign Office rejected on Thursday the US impression that Islamabad was 'abdicating to the Taliban,' saying Pakistan was playing a 'positive and constructive role' and would continue to do so."

"Pakistanis Realizing Taliban Threat, Says Hillary" "Daily Times" (04/24)

"Pakistan is beginning to recognize the severity of the threat posed by an extremist insurgency that is encroaching on major urban areas, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Thursday. Clinton told a House of Representatives subcommittee that 'changing paradigms and mindsets is not easy, but I do believe there is an increasing awareness in not just the Pakistani govt but the Pakistani people that this insurgency - coming closer and closer to major cities - does pose a threat.'"

"US Working To Improve Indo-Pak Ties: Hillary" "Daily Times" (04/24)

"The United States said on Thursday it is engaged at the highest levels on the 'profound question' of improving Pakistan-India relations as any escalation over Kashmir would jeopardize security and severely harm the ongoing war on terror."

"Hillary Urges Donors To Keep Pledges" "Dawn" (04/24)

"US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told a congressional panel on Thursday that the United States and other nations who pledged more than \$5 billion to Pakistan last week needed to keep their pledges. In a testimony before the House Appropriations Committee, Secretary Clinton sought supplemental funding of \$497 million for Pakistan, saying that 'progress in Afghanistan, we believe, depends on progress in Pakistan.'"

"Obama To Remind Zardari, Karzai Of Their Duties: US" "The News" (04/24)

"Ahead of U.S. President Barack Obama's meetings with Afghan and Pakistani counterparts here next month the White House has said that he would remind them of their responsibilities pertaining to the fight against al-Qaeda and Taliban in the region."

"Obama To Seek Pak-Afghan Trade Agreement" "Daily Times" (04/24)

"United States President Barack Obama will try to mediate a new trade agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan when he meets their leaders next month, the US ambassador to Pakistan, Anne Patterson, has said. Presidents Hamid Karzai and Asif Ali Zardari will be asked to update their 'very antiquated' 44-year-old trade treaty, the envoy said. A new treaty 'would help enormously by having cheaper goods shipped into Afghanistan and help Pakistan by giving it access to Central Asia,' she told Bloomberg."

"U.S. 'Extremely Concerned' About Taliban Advance" "The News" (04/24)

"The United States is extremely concerned about security situation in Pakistan, the White House said on Thursday, a day after Washington said Islamabad had abdicated to militants in the Swat valley region. 'I think the news over the past several days is very disturbing, it is something that takes a significant amount of President Barack Obama's time,' White House spokesman Robert Gibbs told a news conference." senator john kerry has said that "pakistan is in a moment of peril" and that the white house does not yet have an "adequate policy or plan to deal with" the coun- try. meanwhile, secretary of state hillary clinton has said that the "pakistan govern- ment is basically abdicating to the taliban and to the extremists." taken together, the statements indicate the alarm in

washington, at both the slide in pakistan and the american response to it. relations between the us and pakistan have undeni- ably worsened in recent weeks. the pakistan govern- ment has bristled at the tough statements of american officials, which have unfortunately echoed the tone of the bush adminis- tration's 'transactional' and 'condition-laden' approach. matters only deteriorated when the us house of representatives proposed that aid to pakistan be tied to ensuring pakistan doesn't support terrorist activity in india. for its part, the pakistan army has been incandescent about continu- ing statements by american officials against the isi and its alleged involvement with militant groups. there are two aspects to consider here. first, the paki- stani view. while officials here have been rightly criti- cal on occasion, they have sin- gularly failed to take the ini- tiative. the established pres- ent pattern is that first the us raises an issue and then we respond. a new policy for afghanistan and pakistan is presented - and then we commend or criticise it. safe havens in fata are raised as an issue - and then we raise questions about inadequate measures on the afghan side of the border. where in all of this is pakistan's own outlook, developed indigenously, pre- sented coherently and defended persuasively? in short, if militancy is security problem no 1, then what, where and how are we going to do something about it? in swat, we have tried to do things our own way, but the government has never explained what exactly it would do if sufi mohammad or maulana fazlullah decided to take matters into their own hands. now that sufi mohammad has categorically rejected the jurisdiction of the superior courts and the ttp has taken over buner, prime minister gilani has offered this gem: "if peace is not restored, we can revisit the idea (of the nizam- i-adl)." next, the us approach. secretary clinton may well be right in saying that the pakistani people "need to speak out forcefully" against the government's policy of appeasement in swat. but this amounts to going over the head of the government it claims is an ally and under- mining its authority among the people. and all the tough talk against pakistan cannot conceal that the americans are themselves puzzled about how exactly to approach pakistan. american officials need to remember what went so wrong under the bush administration: poor policy coupled with unhelpful pub- lic statements. repeating the mistakes of the past will have the same negative consequences.

"Holbrooke Answers Geo Questions Today" "The News" (04/24)

"Geo TV will telecast an interview of U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke with Dr Shahid Masood in 'Meray Mutabiq Special' at 11 pm on Friday (today). This is Holbrooke's first ever interview to any TV channel in the region."

"Mullen Calls On Air Chief, JCSC Chairman" "Daily Times" (04/24)

"US Joint Chief of Staff Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen separately met Pakistan's Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee Gen Tariq Majid and Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal (ACM) Rao Qamar Suleman on Thursday."

"Govt Not To Allow State Within State: Gilani" "The News" (04/24)

"Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani on Thursday said the government would not allow state within a state or parallel courts and the writ of the government would be ensured at all costs. He expressed these views while talking to newsmen after his visit to the Cabinet Division here on Thursday."

"PM For 'Other Options' If Swat Peace Deal Fails" "Dawn" (04/24)

"Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani has said the government reserves the right to exercise other options if Swat peace deal fails and the process of Talibanisation continues. Talking to reporters on Thursday, he said the Swat agreement was aimed to restore peace in the valley and provide speedy justice to the people."

"PML-N Seeks Briefing By ISPR On Swat Plight" "Dawn" (04/24)

"National Assembly members voiced worries on Thursday about marauding Taliban in the North-West Frontier Province, with the main opposition party urging Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani to urgently take national leaders into confidence about how the government planned to counter militants violating a peace deal."

"Army Alarmed As Taliban Eying On Mardan, Swabi" "Dawn" (04/24)

"After taking over Buner the Taliban roll into Mardan and that's the

end of the game, a senior Pakistani law-enforcement official in the NWFP told 'The New York Times' on Wednesday. The report claimed that when the Taliban entered Buner, the Pakistan army did not put up a defense apparently abiding by the agreement signed by the government in Swat. Local politician Jamsheer Khan told NYT that people were initially determined to resist the Taliban in Buner, but that they were discouraged by the deal the government struck with the Taliban in Swat."

"Sufi Extends Darul Qaza Deadline" "Dawn" (04/24)

"At the request of the NWFP government, TNSM chief Maulana Sufi Mohammad agreed on Thursday to defer the deadline of April 23 he had set for setting up Darul Qaza in Malakand. He, however, refused to change his statement that the British-era political and judicial system in Pakistan was 'un-Islamic'."

"No Plan To Occupy Tarbela: Taliban" "The News" (04/24)

"The commander of the banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Buner, Maulana Khalilur Rahman, on Thursday said they had no intention of occupying the Tarbela Dam and moving beyond the Margalla Hills as a Qaumi Jirga in Swarai demanded of the government to exercise restraint."

"NATO Chief Ruled Out Raids Into Pakistan" "Daily Times" (04/24)

"NATO's Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer on Thursday ruled out any cross-border raids into Pakistan by the alliance's troops in Afghanistan."

"Six Nato Fuel Tankers Torched In Peshawar" "Daily Times" (04/24)

"Six tankers supplying fuel to NATO forces in Afghanistan were gutted and a guard sustained injuries after suspected Taliban opened fire on them on Thursday, police said."

"Malik Presents 'Proof Of Indian Hand In Unrest'" "Dawn" (04/24)

"At a closed-door Senate session on Thursday, Interior Adviser E Rehman Malik presented a bleak picture of the security situation in the country and showed what he called evidence of the involvement of India, Afghanistan and Russia in terrorist activities. It is the first time Pakistan has blamed these countries and cited evidences which, it is believed, will be shared with the international community, particularly the United States, which has expressed concern over growing militancy in the country."

"India Denies Helping BLA" "Dawn" (04/24)

"India on Thursday denied any role in Pakistan's difficulties with the Balochistan Liberation Army and said the accusation by a senior official in Islamabad did not deserve a response. 'These are entirely baseless allegations and we see no reason to dignify them with a response,' an Indian foreign ministry spokesman said."

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Editorials/Op-eds  
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"Setting Things Right," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (04/24)

"As time passes, the US assessment of the Pakistan situation following the conclusion of the Swat peace deal is taking on a gloomier look and one finds top American officials making statements that not only show the Obama Administration's exasperation at Islamabad's attitude towards terrorism but also its disregard of ordinary norms of diplomacy. One wonders that if the US were so much concerned, what inhibits it from delivering to the Pakistan Army the modern equipment that could facilitate the task of tracking down the militants in the tricky tribal terrain."

"Problems On Both Sides," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (04/24)

"... The established present pattern is that first the U.S. raises an issue and then we respond... In short, if militancy is security problem No 1, then what, where and how are we going to do something about it? In Swat, we have tried to do things our own way, but the

government has never explained what exactly it would do if Sufi Mohammad or Maulana Fazlullah decided to take matters into their own hands... Secretary Clinton may well be right in saying that the Pakistani people 'need to speak out forcefully' against the government's policy of appeasement in Swat. ... And all the tough talk against Pakistan cannot conceal that the Americans are themselves puzzled about how exactly to approach Pakistan. American officials need to remember what went so wrong under the Bush administration: poor policy coupled with unhelpful public statements. Repeating the mistakes of the past will have the same negative consequences."

"The Final Fall," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (04/24)

"... Even as the threat grows, by the day, by the hour, even by the minute, our government fails to say how it plans to hold back the menace. Does it indeed intend to do so at all? Or has it fallen in with that flawed line of thinking about the Taliban being friends and the Indians foes that has contributed so immensely to the problems Pakistan faces today. The ANP, apparently unashamed by what is happening, continues its increasingly absurd attempts to defend the deal. With each statement its' leaders make, another nail is driven into the coffin of the proud party founded by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan that stood for peace, and tolerance and the values of liberal thought. Will we find the moral courage, the will, the strength to stand together and fight off the Taliban? Can we wrest back from them the territory they hold, inch by inch, foot by foot and acre by acre - or is the battle already lost? We wait for our leaders to offer up an answer."

"Displeasing U.S. Act Of Inciting The Pakistani Nation," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (04/24)

"The U.S. and its allies are engaged in a propaganda campaign against Pakistan's integrity since the day peace was established in Swat, to the extent that now Hillary Clinton has appealed to Pakistanis to raise their voice against the government's policy of tolerating the Taliban. The U.S. usually reserves such statements for countries it does not favor like Iran, Cuba, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. But this is the first time a U.S. Secretary of State has included Pakistan in this group. Wisdom demands that the U.S. wait for the Swat peace deal to produce results and give time to the NWFP government and Taliban and Sufi Muhammad to make their efforts for peace successful. If God forbid, events take a different turn, as being feared by the U.S. and highlighted by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the government has said that it will change its policy and the nation would undoubtedly support it. Instead of issuing orders from Washington, the U.S. should strive to get its troops out of Afghanistan because the real cause of terrorism is U.S. presence in Afghanistan."

"Hillary Clinton Should Cast A Glance On U.S. Policies," an editorial in the center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan" (cir. 10,000) (04/24)

"Secretary Clinton should understand that Sufi Muhammad's statements on the judiciary and other issues are unacceptable for the majority of Pakistanis. Pakistan's government, civil society and military leadership are under no illusion whatsoever. Pakistan has a strong constitutional infrastructure and can face any kind of challenge. However, the U.S. should review its own policies and avoid making unreasonable demands on Pakistan."

"Threats To The Country And Government's Duties," an editorial in the liberal Urdu daily "Express" (cir. 100,000) (04/24)

"U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said that the Pakistanis and the Pakistani diaspora should raise their voice against the government's policy of tolerating the Taliban... This statement is akin to inciting Pakistanis against their government. But since the government is not properly informing the nation about Swat, the people have no option but to believe such statements. And it is not just Swat that is worrying the nation. The situation in Balochistan is no less dangerous..."

"Mr. Kerry's Correct Analysis," an editorial in the Lahore-based

independent Urdu daily "Din" (04/24)

"Chairman of Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the mover of the Kerry-Lugar Bill, Mr John Kerry has rightly pointed towards the threats to Pakistan and insufficient U.S. assistance... Mr Kerry has also called the Obama administration's "Af-Pak" term inappropriate... It is encouraging that senior U.S. leaders like Senator Kerry are not only aware of the problems Pakistan is facing due to the war on terror but are also desirous of increasing U.S. cooperation and assistance to Pakistan as they feel that the U.S. is responsible for these problems. Pakistan army and state institutions have become insecure due to the war on terror. In these circumstances, the U.S. should increase its level of cooperation with Pakistan and take help from leaders like Mr. Kerry to remove misunderstandings between the two countries."

"General Kayani Must Play His Role," an editorial note in the Karachi-based, pro Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (04/24)

"U.S. Admiral Mike Mullen has met with Army Chief General Kayani for the second time within a week... People of Pakistan are disappointed with their political leaders, and they don't expect from them that they will be able to prevent the U.S. drone attacks ever. Therefore, it is the responsibility of General Kayani as the ultimate sentinel of the nation to play his role to bring the drone strikes to a halt."

"Adrift And Lost, Pakistan Awaits A Miracle," an op-ed by Ayaz Amir in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (04/24)

"... Yes, the Americans are a problem and, stuck in Afghanistan, they have their own axes to grind. True also that more often than not we give the impression of being a plaything in their hands, serving their interests more than our own. But this can be corrected and we can be masters of our own fate if we set the direction of our national compass right. The stakes couldn't be higher. We shake ourselves and take matters in hand. Or we allow the present drift to continue, in which case we could do worse than study the fate of Yugoslavia."

"More Complicated Than You Think," an op-ed by Ejaz Haider in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (04/24)

"... Pakistani state and society is far more complex and multi-layered for it to come apart in the way reports in the US press predict."

"Fighting The Hordes," an op-ed by Ayesha Siddiqi in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (04/24)

"We can fight the threat posed by the Taliban only if we muster the required will, develop a clear understanding of what lies ahead and then evolve a coherent strategy. . . This is a time when everyone needs to stand up and not seek shelter in political expediency. As such, Mian Nawaz Sharif cannot hide behind his political deal with the PPP and support the Malakand agreement while at the same time talk about the threat posed by Talibanisation."

"Confusion & Illusion," an op-ed by Harris Khalique in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (04/24)

"... If the leading politicians representing mainstream political parties and media gurus who have fully encroached upon the prime time on television and front pages in the print media continue to confuse people, and the military continues to harbor its illusion of power over different fighting groups which it sponsored in the past for a different geo-strategic game, all will be lost. Frankenstein once created attacks its own creator. When the house is on fire, the fire has to be put out first and then you determine whether the cause was a short circuit or a fireball thrown from outside."

"Extreme Positions," an op-ed by Dr Masooda Bano in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (04/24)

"... It is clear that military operations are not a solution to fighting militancy, and if the state is moving away from that

strategy, that is good news. However, to say that the alternative to military operations is to concede to demands of groups which are armed and can impose their will on the public is clearly going to another extreme. Both of these are responses of an incompetent state."

"People Will Have To Come Out To Save Country," an editorial note in the popular rightist Urdu-language daily "Ausaf" (cir. 10,000) (04/24)

"The hype of Talibanization is a tactical move of the anti-Pakistani elements in the psychological warfare against the Pakistani nation. In fact, they want to paralyze the Pakistani nation psychologically before the final showdown, so that they (Pakistanis) cannot play their role to save country except to become deaf and dumb silent spectators. It is time for the people of Pakistan to wake up and come to the streets to demonstrate their power and chase away this deliberate move."

"Solution Of People's Problems Can Restore Trust On Government," an editorial in the leading mass circulation centrist Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (04/24)

"If people of Balochistan are provided with basic amenities like drinkable water, economic infrastructure, employment, healthcare and education even after six decades of deprivation, and they are given a fair chance to play a part in decision-making process and legislation at all level from the local management to the provincial and national legislatures, it is for sure that they will support the government to foil the conspiracies of foreign forces with all their heart. And no foreign intelligence agencies will be able to exploit them so easily."

"Interior Advisor's Address To The Senate," an editorial note in the Lahore-based populist center-right Urdu daily "Khabrain" (cir. 50,000) (04/24)

"Interior Advisor Rehman Malik has rightly said that we are willing to give the Baloch people everything but independence. The government should put its words into action, but if despite all this, some elements remain involved in sabotage, then they must be dealt with strongly. The government should keep all options open, instead of just relying on force. The government must also discuss matters on the diplomatic level with countries it has reservations about."

"External Red Herrings And State Abdication," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (04/24)

"The Interior Adviser, Mr Rehman Malik, repeated himself at the Senate Wednesday when he claimed that India was involved in fomenting trouble in Balochistan with the help of the Kabul government, but his addition of "some hostile agencies" along with India might mean others like Uzbekistan, Iran and the CIA. Far away in Washington, speaking at the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the US Secretary of State, Ms Hilary Clinton, bemoaned the abdication of Pakistan in the face of a dangerously expanding hold of the Taliban over Pakistani territory... In fact, this is not the time for isolating Pakistan in the world but for being "introvertQon our domestic terrorism with whatever help we can get from the international community."  
Feierstein